

## **I Samuel – chapter 2, Luke 1:46-55**

*Hannah prayed and said,*

Hannah: My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory.

*And Mary said,*

Mary: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Hannah: There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

Mary: Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

Hannah: The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength.

Mary: He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly;

Hannah: Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.

Mary: He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

Hannah: For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail. His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed.

Mary: He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

## The Birth of Jesus

**2** In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

## The Shepherds and the Angels

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,<sup>[a]</sup> the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,<sup>[b]</sup> praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

**December 24, 2017, 7 p.m.**

**Luke 1: 46-55; Luke 2: 1-20**

**Mary's Treasure**

**Kerra Becker English**

*My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely from now on, all nations will call me blessed.*

Mary's prayer is no small prayer. It's grandiose. Though she gives a head nod to her lowly state, she certainly doesn't stop there being all meek and mild like she is so often portrayed. Rather, she embraces the fullness of the role to which she has been appointed. She allows herself not only to be a tiny light shining in the darkness, she likens herself to a lens that will magnify and glorify God's love throughout the whole world, so much so that all NATIONS will call her blessed. The historical memory of her will be monumental. She will be known from here on after, not only by her Western and rather prudish name, the Virgin Mary, but in the Eastern church she is remembered as the theotokos, the Mother of God.

After her exultant opening, she goes on to pray a prayer that encompasses the whole world, the world as God has taught her to see it, not as the world typically is. Her prayer, just like Hannah's before her, was written as a full-throated song of deliverance. These two biblical women blessed with powerfully spiritual sons - Jesus and Sampson, were not content to raise their boys to be part of the dominant hierarchy, not of their particular times, not of any times. In both of their prayers the powerful are set straight by the powerless. Those who can eat their fill whenever they want go hungry, and the starving are filled with good food. And God's people are recognized for being part of this reversal, for remembering each and every time that God has guarded the

faithful or kept promises to their ancestors. When these women experienced the fullness of God in prayer and song, they caught a glimpse of how far reaching God's love is for the whole world – not just the powerful in it.

Mary not only accepted the role of being Jesus' mother, what I love about her is that she made her own deepest desires known to God. She spoke up, not only for herself, but for her people, for people in need of a significant change, for the people sick and tired of always being so sick and tired. Luke's gospel gives Mary this big, bold, beautiful voice of her own, and then at the time of Jesus' birth Luke also lets us see Mary in a time of tender quiet. Both prayers are Mary. Both prayers can be our prayers too.

That's what I'm hoping for this Christmas – the desire to pray like Mary – with the full expectation that God is ushering a time of justice for all. Her prayer was relentless, demanding, and she called on God to keep the nature of God's divine promises. She wasn't the first. And she need not be the last to pressure God for some accountability in righting the wrongs of the world.

But I also want to learn, like Mary, to ponder in my heart. Mary may have known that she was pregnant with the child of the royal line of David, and she was certainly astounded that an angelic messenger foretold that this child would be God's own son. And yet, it was in that moment following Jesus' birth when shepherds, SHEPHERDS came to her to tell her about the heavenly voices being raised in their fields that she paused long enough to take in a quiet tender moment of gratitude. The lowly shepherds hearing a word that told them not to be afraid and to expect good news warmed her heart. While everyone else was gawking in amazement at the shepherds' story and startled that they had followed the signs and found the child, I think she simply knew that God was doing the strange work God does to bring such synchronous moments

together. She sighed. She retreated into herself, and she had a moment that Luke captured for us to forever ponder what it might have been like to be Mary in that moment.

Now I know that this is supposed to be Jesus' night. And it is. But still, he's a baby in this story and not doing so much quite yet as far as human stories go. So maybe it is about Mary – about what she thought, about what she dreamed, about what she hoped for this newborn's life that was to be so astonishingly different – by being absolutely the same flesh, the same bone, the same human life as you and me. This is God, cradled in her arms, as dependent on her as a mother as any of us ever were on our mothers and caretakers. The powerful words that come from Mary's lips, the tender thoughts that linger in Mary's heart, are some of the same prayers that we wrap around this night and its meaning for us. We pray like Mary, with Mary, and because of Mary for our own world to come around, and our own lives to be so blessed.

Can you hear the angels singing?

*This is good news... of a GREAT JOY... For ALL people.*

*That to you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*

*This is your sign. He will be born in a humble place, wrapped in modest clothing, and yet, that's how you will know that he is the one. Go, find him.*

Luke tells us that Mary's treasure was found in hearing these words. There is joy – for ALL. The Lord is here. And the sign God is willing to show all people about the incarnation appears in the humblest of places – again representing this powerful reversal that was her heavy with pregnancy prayer.

And now, we treasure these words ourselves. They are the very proclamation of Christmas Eve – coming from the most familiar of the birth narratives from the gospels. So let them sink in. Let them be both treasure for now and prayer for tomorrow. Make the deepest desires of your heart known, so you too can pray like Mary. Amen.